

Globalizing teacher training: Embedding global education perspectives in multi-disciplinary pre-service teacher programs

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Abstract

This study presents an overview of the issues involved when a group of teacher educators implemented a global education focus across a variety of education programs at their university. Although these problems and issues arose from the global education agenda, some of the lessons learned and problems encountered can be applied to teacher educators in other fields. Their experiences provide a glimpse into the teacher educator world – a world of compromise. These experiences encompass the personal dilemmas, the professional learning and decision making, and the political dimensions of their work and provide a case study in professional co-operation and collaboration in the service of an ideal of encouraging a global perspective in a new generation of teachers.

Introduction

Globalisation is currently seen as a major focus of education internationally but the term means many different things to many different people. One facet of globalisation is the increased interest in global education, which in itself is a contested term, symbolising different facets of education for and about globalisation such as peace education, environmental education, development education, multicultural education and various forms of critical education associated with social justice. In teacher education addressing globalisation and global education is seen as important but knowing what they mean in the context of delivering best practice in present day Australian classrooms is problematic. A group of tertiary educators came together in one university to implement global education in a variety of courses across a number of programs. Their interest in participating in such a research team arose from separate interests in international travel, social education, attendance at a conference focussed on global education, interest in Human Rights, Asia Education and peace education to name a few. The study was supported by Ausaid with resources and professional materials provided by the NSW Professional Teaching Council. This research investigates conceptions of globalisation and global education and explores how tertiary educators came to see it operating in practice as they worked together in a collaborative approach to teaching preservice teachers. The study revealed some sharp divisions of opinions among these educators and the development of more sophisticated approaches to teaching about global education as they continued with the project. The findings provide some direction as to how to develop school teachers' skills in implementing global education.

Some definitions

The preamble to *The Melbourne Declaration on Educational Goals for Young Australians* (MCEETYA, 2008) focuses on the need for young Australians in the 21st century to consider the global implications of their education. The Melbourne Declaration argues that global mobility and technological progress has created opportunities to address global economic markets and nurture a sense of global citizenship. Australia is not alone in considering the implications of globalisation for education. The concept of globalisation in most references appears to be couched in terms of challenges and opportunities contextualised by diverse populations within national states, multiple local and international economic markets often enhanced by technological advances such as Internet, issues that are greater than the capacity of the nation state to address such as environmental sustainability, or lack of it, and in the Australian context our need to live and work in an Asian neighbourhood. Hoepper (2011) pointed out that globalisation involves what people do and also how they think. People can access opportunities from around the world more readily in the 21st century but they also develop a world consciousness where they see themselves as citizens of the world as well as a local and national citizen. Being a global citizen can involve many challenges and constraints, and as educators there is a need for us to illustrate for students both the opportunities and the negative issues that are likely to arise from such globalisation. The Melbourne Declaration acknowledges the 'glocal' aspects of globalisation when it avows:

In the 21st century Australia's capacity to provide a high quality of life for all will depend on the ability to compete in the global economy on knowledge and innovation (MCEETYA, 2008, p.4);

and also acknowledges:

As well as knowledge and skills a school's legacy to young people should include national values of democracy, equity and justice and personal values and attributes such as honesty, resilience and respect for others (MCEETYA, 2008, p. 5).

There are personal, local, national and global aspects to being globally educated. It can be very complicated. As Ibrahim (2005) pointed out, global citizens are also local and national citizens and many initiatives in civics education such as knowledge of local and national democratic approaches to decision making are crucial for global citizenship. Most definitions of global education include ideas of human rights, equity, conflict resolution and social justice. For instance Osler and Vincent (2002, p. 2) suggested that global education:

... is based on the principles of co-operation, non-violence, respect for human rights

and cultural diversity, democracy and tolerance [and] is characterized by pedagogical

approaches based on human rights and a concern for social justice which encourage

critical thinking and responsible participation.

Similar perspectives are evident in the Australian statement on global education, *Global Perspectives: A framework for global education in Australian schools* (Curriculum Corporation, 2008), which pointed out that global education is distinct, although had commonalities with, civics and citizenship, engaging young Australians with Asia, environmental education, language education and values education. This form of education is not only about political procedures and attitudes but also environmental

perspectives and knowledge of languages and cultural identities.

A further refinement to the concept of global education comes with many references in research to a critical global education. A critical global education is a curriculum that fosters critical dialogue and action on global issues (Subedi, 2010). Such a curriculum would investigate historical factors that help students understand unequal global relationships. It would also deal with issues beyond the nation state, examining power and privilege; it would have a reflective ethical perspective; and it would value marginalised knowledge such as third world traditions and perspectives (Merryfield, 2002, 2009). A critical global education will try to counter stereotypes, generalisations and essentialist views of ‘others’ and allow complex views on both historical and contemporary issues.

Thus, as Reynolds and Lovat pointed out in 2001, in the area of global education there is a desperate need for more information about the value of global education and its effect on student learning. High stakes testing and assessment regimes tend to limit global content and provide little room for global perceptual skills and values (Cogan and Grossman, 2009). Tye (1999) found in his study of global education practices in 52 countries that there were few teacher professional education programs anywhere in the world, particularly at the pre-service level, directed specifically at developing global education teachers and that there was a lack of training, skills and interest in teaching global education generally. Examination of how teacher educators implement global education in teacher education programs can assist our understanding of good practice in globalising and/or locating our curriculum in a global context.

The Global Education Research and Teaching (GERT) team

The issues, conflicts and decision making quandaries of implementing a global education focus in our courses are interrogated in this paper, in an action research approach, at a political, personal and a professional level. A group of teacher educators in the School of Education at the University of Newcastle in Australia worked together with the support of Ausaid and the NSW Professional Teachers' Council to incorporate a global education perspective in our teaching courses while concurrently addressing the needs of teacher accreditation in NSW and university program and course procedures. The team members were chosen because of their participation in a number of global education initiatives, thus ensuring all had strong credentials in this area. The team members chose the courses in which they were best able to incorporate such an approach. The initial approach involved team members individually selecting which areas of the curriculum and which areas of their teaching portfolios would best benefit from such an approach. As is typical in an action research approach reflection is key and so as a group we considered our colleagues' approaches and talked through the issues as they arose. As a result we adopted a much stronger interdisciplinary approach as teacher educators in English, Social Studies, History, Maths and Geography worked together to develop these understandings in primary and secondary programs. This became an action research project in that there were cycles of change and reflection as well as a notion of practitioners working on their practice to improve it (Elliot, 1991). As Noffke (1997) pointed out, action research is a political, a personal and a professional approach to research and thus the conflicts and interrogations of practice occur at the political, personal and professional

level and so the process of change will be reported with that in mind.

The Process

At the beginning of the team approach we collated some conceptions of what we were trying to do as supported by the Australian Commonwealth *Global Perspectives: A Framework for global education in Australian school (2008)* (Bradbery and Reynolds, 2010). From our perspective global citizens participate in shaping a better shared future for the whole world. They acknowledge the unity and interdependence of human societies and have both a sense of self and an appreciation of cultural diversity. They actively support social justice and human rights and build peace and sustainable futures in different times and places – they are predisposed to take action for change. Global citizens take responsibility for their own actions and respect and value diversity by contributing to a more peaceful, just and sustainable world. Global citizens in 21st century Australia also develop meaningful relationships with our neighbours in the Asia-Pacific and Indian Ocean regions. Thus teaching for global citizenship in a school setting is more than developing a base of knowledge and skills. It also entails promoting positive values and participation and is relevant across all key learning areas (Commonwealth of Australia, 2008). The Global Perspectives Framework for Australian schools developed by the Commonwealth of Australia in conjunction with AusAID, the Global Education Project, the Curriculum Corporation and the Asia Education Foundation listed five key learning emphases reflecting themes in global education as Interdependence and Globalisation, Identity and Cultural Diversity, Social Justice and Human Rights, Peace Building and Conflict Resolution, and Sustainable Futures. Thus all five learning emphases, at least in this analysis of what can be defined as global education, are interdisciplinary. The initial approach for us all was to try to implement aspects of these five learning emphases and consider the issues as they arose.

The academics saw their practices and ideas change over time. The six academics involved met on a number of occasions and also filled out a questionnaire periodically. This paper uses the questionnaires from a period mid point through implementing the first round of courses (there were 10 different courses and 923 students involved) and then at the beginning of the next round of courses (seven different courses and 1030 students).

Initially when asked why they were doing this responses included:

It's important that our students do understand the importance of local place and space, as well as a more globalised view of the world so we all have a more sustainable future.

Keen interest in integrating knowledge – believe it is effective pedagogy.
Believe we should model what we preach (integration)

At the beginning of a new round of courses when asked why they were continuing to do this they replied:

Commitment to human rights, education, and world peace

Good for students to consider big picture rather than being totally egocentric

In the second round of the questionnaire they had all taken on board some of the values that global education encouraged. Initially a number had participated because Ausaid had asked us and because we were given good resources to support students. Their

understandings were not as developed and they vaguely equated it with interdisciplinary approaches to teaching. In the second survey they had a more nuanced view with reference to international perspectives, big ideas and human rights values.

When asked about the types of resources useful for teaching global education some indicative responses included:

USEFUL – relevant – to syllabus or students –attractive – generate student interaction

Engaging material and closely presented issues.

After teaching for a semester they clarified these responses when asked about the types of resources useful for teaching global education by indicating:

Relevant to school classroom/outcomes – of interest

Clear links to global education themes that are stage appropriate

Thus the key issue from the academic's view after teaching the students for a semester was that the resources be able to be seen to fit with curriculum documents and that they clearly related to global education themes as defined by the Curriculum Corporation (2008). There was less focus on the attractiveness of the resources (although this too was essential and particularly the focus on engagement and student centredness). It is interesting that no one specifically mentioned web or internet resources as a necessity, possibly reflecting our dependence on Ausaid paper materials and resources to guide us in these first two terms of implementation and our lack of ready access for all students to internet access during class.

Academics were then asked what made it easy to do global education and then what made it hard to do global education at two points in their teaching. The initial focus was on the value of resources, both human and product based as contributing to the ease of implementation. Key people were valued for the support and expertise they were able to offer both academics and students. Expanding the number of key people as a resource, particularly those with expertise in the various global education perspectives is an area for development.

Our Global Education research team initially identified collaborative team work as a highly valued component of our way of working. This collaborative approach taken in our project has been sustained resulting in practices such as co-designing and sharing of resource products, identifying and utilising team members' specific expertise and the development of a sense of responsibility amongst the team for inspiring the next generation of teachers. All participants enjoyed the team aspects of the program. They liked comparing notes about what they had done with the various resources and feeding back to the others what the student had done with a particular resources. Right from the beginning this was an aspect of the program that appealed. They talked about the value of mentoring, of collegiality of time to have a bit of a joke about what had happened in a particular classroom session. This was a very positive outcome of teaching global education in a university setting. Because global education was of necessity an interdisciplinary approach it was essential to talk to others about what they were doing and to coordinate use of resources and so on. It thus became an action research approach to professional development for the tertiary educators. This has carried over to some joint conference and journal papers where all members of the team provide feedback on writing and ideas associated with global education teaching strategies.

This emphasis on resources as teaching support has continued throughout the project.

Resources provide a crutch or a tool, they enable teachers to support and develop learning so that exploration, discovery and interaction are encouraged in learners. Visual images, whether in digital, 2 dimensional or 3 dimensional forms allow abstract concepts to be viewed, discussed and understood at greater levels of complexity. Diversity in student needs and interests can be catered for by careful selection of diverse resources. Appropriateness in resource selection is important in ensuring that the resource/s are able to support the learning outcomes, be age and interest appropriate and readily available. A future team action is to decrease our dependence on Ausaid paper resources by increasing the use of web based internet resources in class. This action will be enabled by the purchase of a transportable class set of Ipads and the access to some new teaching spaces in 2012.

Difficulties in implementing a global education focus into our teaching were not uncommon. Good will and hard work won't solve all problems and a number of issues made this task difficult. Firstly but not in priority order, Global education is a perceived by the team as 'huge area' and not integrated into current syllabus documents that we are required to work with in teacher education. Currently the team has found that it is a difficult task including global education into what could be argued as an already overloaded curriculum in both tertiary and school curriculum documents. Global education perspectives ideally would be integrated into university courses however this is not a simple step but a convoluted process requiring a strong case to be made that complies with university policy and program rules that is then forwarded to various levels of committees for agreement or otherwise before implementation is possible. Secondly, 'Generating student interest in topics' is not isolated to introducing global education to our undergraduate students. Students' study habits for all courses are constrained by factors such as time, outside work, financial constraints, work-leisure balance, family responsibilities, student diversity, language problems and timetabling. These factors impact upon student attitudes towards study and study content and can present as negativity and disinterest from students. Action to alleviate this is difficult given the diversity in students' cultural, social and educational aspirations however our plan to introduce the web as an additional resource may go some way to alleviating this 'disinterest' given that the majority of students are considered as and enact as 'digital natives'.

Thirdly, team members considered that 'there is a need to maintain a level of focus on the content material, skills etc for the (university) course', and this can't be abandoned. Finding the resources to enable the integration that connect the current courses to global education is time consuming and frequently unrewarding because they simply are either not available or not yet written.

In the second iteration of the survey the concern about maintaining course integrity while integrating global perspectives was most prominent in the responses as evidenced by the comment 'Syllabus demands and compulsory accreditation requirements limit scope for global perspectives'. This is further complicated by 'Crowded requirements of (the NSW) Institute (of Teachers)' and as such global education risks being viewed as an additional burden. The disconnect between set texts and global education perspectives currently positions global education as an add on. 'It is not set in textbooks, teaching units' and 'Trying to make sure I cover it with all the other content which must be done' exemplifies the concerns of team members. This disconnect calls for action by researchers and authors to consider integration of global perspectives across all syllabus Key Learning Areas and disciplines by incorporating this perspective into the texts they write, whether web or paper based, for the teacher education audience. Inclusion of global education as a given in discipline texts and where set curriculum content is constructed from a global perspective will go quite some way to alleviating what is

currently perceived as a huge area and so considered insurmountable.

Conclusion

This project, where we worked as an interdisciplinary and cross program team in global education, resonated with us as teacher educators at the professional, the personal and the political level. Personal development and self awareness are usually highly regarded in action research but teachers tend to focus simply on their classroom context without considering, in this personal frame, the context of this personal experience. As Noffke (1997) pointed out the social justice frame is often not addressed in the personal – identity is not addressed through historically and contextually shaped understandings. We all started this in a bit of a rush. We were offered the support because we had tried to include global education perspectives in a variety of ways, some were working on peace perspectives, some were interested in global interdependence from an historical and geographic perspective, some were interested in human rights and ways to use literature to do this. Most of us were interested in sustainable futures and as our school of education had put forward a sustainable futures electives with a number of elective course to be offered under that banner many of us were interested in considering what that actually meant (environmental perspectives, citizenship education, politics education, peace education, human right education). So there was a lot of self interest – what do I like to teach?, what do I think is best for the students? how can I ‘make a difference’? Initially there was little reflection about why and how we came to this point of view , an observation made by Noffke. At this stage we have gone little beyond this except to note that in the different disciplinary contexts things are done differently but the collegial aspect of the team has been personally satisfying for everyone involved.

Action research is often used as a means of professional development as well as a way of adding to the status and standing of the profession. The professional development of this program was definitely very apparent. Having easy access to all these resources, considering how they fitted with the Australian government statement, meeting and spending time with Dr Susan Bliss our most energetic and very knowledgeable NSW coordinator was inspiring. Talking to each other about how students worked with the material helped our professional knowledge.

As Noffke (1997) indicated it is important to note that the communities involved in the research come together to address common concerns and work at developing the means to understand each other, to articulate their social position, and to effect change. Knowledge and power are interconnected through action and research. In this project there were a number of political issues that emerged and continue to emerge. Some of the key issues included the actual definition of global education, controversy associated with global education, the politics of graduate standards and curriculum outcomes and how they are linked to cross disciplinary approaches both at school teaching level and in a teacher education program, and the connection between teaching and research. Additionally the politics of university funding came to the fore. Teaching is not really seen as an area worthy of funding unless national teaching grants are elicited. The project

was thus adapted to give it a research focus – an action research focus – to enable us to gain some recognition from the university, albeit token acknowledgement, for our efforts.

It should be recognised that as tertiary educators we too need to practice our teaching and establish best practice in teaching global education. This example of a team approach to implementing global education in a tertiary education program indicated a developmental approach to enhancing our teaching. What emerged as of value for teaching global education was the role of key leaders, of working together, of ensuring it was explicitly linked to syllabus documents so the preservice teachers could see its relevance, the importance of good resources that were multimedia, and visually appealing. One of the key features was that the teachers felt it was important. It was not easy - but its implementation made the staff feel a more professional team rather than isolated. The fact that it was seen as a valid opportunity for research assisted this. Critical approaches were not mentioned but in practice a number of staff members were using materials they had themselves sourced such as human rights literature aimed at children and further web resources other than the global education website were being referred to. They were in practice critiquing the given in an attempt to help students assess their resources. There was a focus on knowledge and the affective and personal as indicated in literature. As an example of action research it has reaped benefits for the teacher educators involved at a personal, professional and political level and provides direction for this important area of the curriculum for the future.

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